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AUTHOR Ronk, Donald E.
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ABSTRACT

A study compared demographic and test data on the Vietnamese mothers or primary caregivers of Amerasian offspring (hereafter, Amerasian mothers) with those of non-Amerasian peers at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center. Eight hypotheses concerning the educational level, illiteracy rate, English language skills, husband's education, and children's relative educational achievement were tested against the data. Hypotheses also addressed the characteristics of mothers and step-fathers of Afro-Amerasian children. Results were mixed, with some hypotheses supported and some not. It was found that Amerasian mothers had about four years less education, five times the illiteracy rate, and lower levels of English language skills than their peers. The stepfathers of Amerasians placed well above their spouses in education and literacy but not in English skills. No substantial difference was found between Amerasian mothers and their children in years of schooling or literacy rate. The mothers of Afro-Amerasian children had less schooling and a much higher illiteracy rate than Amerasian mothers in general. The step-fathers of Afro-Amerasians had significantly higher levels of schooling, better English skills, and less illiteracy than the mothers, but less achieved schooling and literacy than their Amerasian peers. (MSE)

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EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND ILLITERACY RATES OF MOTHERS AND STEP-FATHERS OF VIETNAMESE AMERASIANS ENROUTE TO THE UNITED STATES

Donald E. Ronk

International Catholic Migration Commission (IESL/CO)

Morong, Bataan

Philippines

June, 1990

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Running head: Educational Level and Illiteracy Rates of Mothers and Step-fathers of Vietnamese Amerasians Enroute to the United States

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ABSTRACT

The suspected lesser years of schooling and higher illiteracy rate of mothers of Vietnamese Amerasians, (or female primary caretakers of Amerasians,) enroute to the United States is believed to have played a role in the lesser schooling achievement of their Amerasian offspring when compared to fully Vietnamese peers. Comparing demographic data on hundreds of mothers of Amerasians against that of non-Amerasian affiliated peers establishes that Amerasian mothers have about four years less education and about five times the illiteracy rate. Mothers of Amerasians, probably coming from families not motivated heavily toward education, probably have not motivated their children toward schooling, which plays an important, though not necessarily conclusive role in their children's poor showing compared to their peers. Other studies have shown that there is no significant difference between the fully Vietnamese half-siblings of Amerasians and their Vietnamese peers with no Amerasian affiliation.

In a comparative study of Vietnamese Amerasian levels of achievement in schooling in Viet Nam, completed by this writer in January, 1990, (Ronk, 1990) it was concluded that Amerasian achievement was significantly lower than that of first asylum refugee youths and the half-siblings of Amerasians of the same age groupings (14-17 years and 17-22 years of age).

That preliminary study showed as well that Afro-Amerasians had significantly less schooling than their Amerasian peers.

Moreover, it appears conclusively established that there were (and are) forms of discrimination against Amerasians in the school system of Viet Nam, despite official Vietnamese disclaimers of discrimination.

It seems inevitable that one who begins studying Amerasian achievement in schooling will continue on into studying the mothers of Amerasians, comparing them demographically with their peers; then to the stepfathers of Amerasians.

The mothers of Amerasians are, as anyone who has worked with them or otherwise known numbers of them will agree, interesting legacies of American involvement in Viet Nam. Most speak a considerable amount of pidgin English that developed from the need to communicate with American men, whether at their jobs as waitresses, clerks, bar maids, professionals such as teachers, secretaries in offices or simply as one-night-stand-prostitutes (which was a minor percentage of the mothers, if studies done thus far are accurate. [USCC, Nov. 1985, p9]).

Like grouping their children as "Amerasian," the

classification as Amerasian mother (more accurately mother of an Amerasian) covers a multitude of types, personalities, weaknesses, strengths, educational achievement or non-achievement. The best and the least of Vietnamese womanhood is represented among them.

But, also like their children, there are some demographic facts that speak loudly about them as a group when compared to peers without Amerasian children.

This study, or series of studies, developed out of studies (Ronk, 1990) done on Amerasian youths. From that, a set of hypotheses about mothers and step-fathers began to emerge which begged for testing with the data available from International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) records at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (PRPC) in the Philippines. (It should be noted as well that this writer spent eight years in Indochina as a civilian in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He worked at the PRPC for seven years prior to beginning these studies -- 15 years with Vietnamese that helped formulate the hypotheses and discussion used here.

In what follows, the term "Amerasian mother" will include all females 35 to 55* years old who are included in the same record of an Amerasian. Thus some aunts or others may be reflected in the data. If such persons are included in the Amerasian's family enroute to the U.S. it is because that

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*Data is available from ICMC on refugees 11.5 through 55 years of age, all of whom attend ICMC training classes.

relative is, in fact, a primary caretaker of the Amerasian. The same applies to men designated as stepfathers in the data. Examination of ICMC records and discussions with refugee officials indicates that all but a negligible percentage of adults over 35 on an Amerasian case are a primary caretaker.

In order to test the hypotheses a number of samplings were taken involving matched ages and arrivals at the PRPC over a period of about 1.5 years. Because of the limited number of Afro-Amerasians at the PRPC, a single sampling was done of PASS and young adult students across four "cycles," a cycle representing about a three-week time-frame of arrival at the PRPC. The demographic results of the samplings were reasonably consistent from sample to sample and were grouped.

As with the studies done by this writer on Amerasians, these on adults linked to Amerasians use the English Placement Test (EPT) developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington (CAL), D.C. as the basis for data. All refugees entering ICMC training classes at the PRPC take the EPT immediately prior to entry to classes. The EPT does a gross measurement of oral English, English reading and writing and native language literacy for placement in classes at an appropriate level of ability (Level A being the lowest with no English and illiteracy in the native language, E+ being the highest at near English language fluency and elegibility as an interpreter.)

THE HYPOTHESES AND ASSUMPTIONS

Hypothesis 1: The mothers of Amerasians, as a group, have achieved less schooling than their female peers* (35-55 years old) without Amerasian children.

The assumption underlying this hypothesis is that, in general, Vietnamese women who became sexually involved with American men, whether officially married or not, came from the lower socio-economic levels of Viet Nam, Viet Nam's primary "class" indicator being education, in this writer's opinion. (See "A Background Discussion" on page 11.)

Hypothesis 2: The mothers of Amerasians will, as a group, have a higher illiteracy rate than their female peers without Amerasian children.

The assumption for Hypothesis 2 is the same as that in Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 3: The mothers of Amerasians will, as a group, have higher levels of English on the English Placement Test (EPT) at the PRPC than their female peers without Amerasian children.

Having lived for periods of time with American men, it is assumed that mothers of Amerasians would have greater opportunity to learn English, hence have acquired more English, than those who presumably did not consort with Americans.

Hypthothesis 4: The stepfathers of Amerasians will score significantly higher in all areas than their spouses, and their

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*"Peers" throughout the document refers to peers at the PRPC.

scores will be consistent with their male peers without Amerasian step-children.

Observation of the step-fathers of Amerasians and discussions with them about their pasts leads to the assumption that most came from a higher socio-economic "class" than their spouses, hence are better educated (see "A Background Discussion" on page 11). Perhaps more importantly, a high percentage of them speak of having been Vietnamese military officers with close links to Americans in Viet Nam and, because of links, the need for English language ability.

Hypothesis 5: The mothers of Amerasians have, as a group, a higher level of school achievement than either their Amerasian or their non-Amerasian children and a lower illiteracy rate than their children.

Mothers of Amerasians were educated prior to 1975 and advent of control of the government by the communists. The assumption is that following 1975 both the Amerasian and non-Amerasian children of a woman who bore an Amerasian would be discriminated against in schooling and the discrimination reflected in years of school achieved.

Hypothesis 6: The mothers of Afro-Amerasian children have a lower level of schooling and higher illiteracy rate than their female peers.

Given the belief that Vietnamese are highly race-concious and discriminate against darker skinned peoples, women who consorted with Afro-Americans would be from a socio-economic

level below those who consorted with Caucasian Americans, much less than those who did not consort with Americans at all, hence less schooled, assuming as well that "class" in Viet Nam is largely predictable on the basis of years of school. (See page 16 for a discussion of class in Viet Nam.)

Hypothesis 7: The step-fathers of Afro-Amerasians have a higher level of schooling and English language ability, and a lower illiteracy rate than their spouses.

Being a participant-observer at the PRPC with considerable contact with the step-fathers of Afro-Amerasians leads this writer to assume the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 8: The step-fathers of Afro-Amerasians have a lower level of schooling and a higher illiteracy rate than their male peers.

As in Hypothesis 7.

TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1: The mothers of Amerasians, as a group, have achieved less schooling than their female peers* (35-55 years old) without Amerasian children.

TABLE I: Mothers of Amerasians

	Group	N=	Number Illit	% Ilit	Ave. Y-S	% C--+
1	Amerasian mothers	299	31	10.4	4.6	25.6
2	Non-Amerasian	186	5	2.6	7.3	38.3

*Indicates Level C (Intermediate) ability with English.

Hypothesis 2: The mothers of Amerasians will, as a group, have a higher illiteracy rate than their female peers without Amerasian children.

As can be seen in TABLE I, the mothers of Amerasians score considerably lower in levels of education achieved than their peers without Amerasian children. As predicted, they have a higher rate of illiteracy than their peers when looked at as a group.

Hypothesis 3: The mothers of Amerasians will, as a group, have higher levels of English on the English Placement Test (EPT) at the PRPC than their female peers without Amerasian children.

TABLE I shows that Amerasian mothers, as a group, had 13 percent less placements in the more advanced levels of English than their peers without Amerasian children, thus disproving the hypothesis.

TABLE II: Mothers of Amerasians

	Group	N=	Number Illit	% Ilit	Ave. Y-S	% C--+
1	Amerasian mothers	299	31	10.4	4.6	25.6
2	F-Asylum mothers	104	2	1.9	7.6	42.3
3	O.D.P. mothers*	82	3	3.6	7.0	34.3

Looking at TABLE II for further examination of the data on

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*Orderly Departure Program that allows Vietnamese to leave Viet Nam by air, precluding the dangerous boat voyage and subsequent stay in a first asylum camp.

TABLE I, (here now broken down into groups by origin of the identification number of the family) it appears obvious that much of the high percentage of advanced English demonstrated by first asylum mothers was learned in refugee camps after leaving Viet Nam and before arriving at the PRPC. Tne fact that O.D.P. mothers, with essentially the same level of schooling, are ranked about equi-distant between Amerasian mothers and first asylum mothers strongly suggests, at the minimum, that an important amount of English is learned in first asylum camps.

The nearly nine percent difference between O.D.P. mothers and Amerasian mothers in placement demonstrates that, in at least placement, Amerasian mothers know less English as a group. As noted below, however, the placement test does a gross measurement of both oral and reading and writing skills, reading and writing skills presumably much more dependent upon <u>formal</u> education in English.*

Contrary to prediction, Amerasian mothers consistently score lower on English language competency than their peers, as measured by the percentage placed in the upper level English classes. (See TABLEs I and II).

A caveat is necessary, however. Since placement in a level involves a combination of English language literacy and oral ability, many Amerasian mothers who have high levels of oral English are placed in Level B (beginning) for lack of reading and

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*Data for examination of this in more detail is not available at this writing.

writing ability in English, and some in Level A if not literate in either Vietnamese or English.

Reading and writing ability in English is closely linked to the level of schooling. As a consequence, learning English either in school (by all accounts, through grammar/translation), or outside school by self-teaching through the same method, ensures at least some development of reading and writing skills, though not necessarily listening/speaking skills. Learning English by association with native language speakers, with little or no attempt at learning reading and writing skills, is usually the method by which Amerasian mothers learned English.

Hypothesis 4: The stepfathers of Amerasians will score significantly higher in all areas than their spouses, and their scores will be consistent with their male peers without Amerasian links.

TABLE III: Step-fathers of Amerasians

	GROUP	N=	Nr. Illit	% Illit	Ave. Y.S.	% C-+
1	Amer Step-Fathers	91	7	7.7	8.3	39.3
2	Amerasian Mothers	99	9	9.0	5.4	37.0
3	First-Asy Fathers	134	0	0.0	9.6	83.9

Step-fathers of Amerasians, as predicted, place well above their spouse's levels of education, with three years more of schooling, on the average, and have a lower rate of illiteracy. Step-fathers of Amerasians do not, however, have a significantly higher percentage representation in the more advanced levels of

English. The Amerasian step-fathers' scores are reasonably consistent with their peers who have no Amerasian affiliations.

First asylum men have a margin of higher ability in every area, most decidedly in the advanced levels of English, as a group upon arrival at the PRPC.

A conclusion drawn from the data that seems obvious is that the step-fathers of Amerasians marry much below their own level of schooling, hence socio-economic class, unlike their peers without Amerasian step-children.*

Approximately 10 percent of the Amerasians passing through the PRPC are accompanied by step-fathers or male caretakers 35 to 55 years of age, examination of the data outside the scope of this paper strongly suggests.

Hypothesis 5: The mothers of Amerasians have, as a group, a higher level of school achievement than either their Amerasian children or their non-Amerasian children and a lower illiteracy rate than their children.

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*A possible explanation is that they married later in life than their peers and through circumstance were forced to marry below their status. Level of schooling among Vietnamese is closely linked to socio-economic class. Some observers suggest there may be a close link between this marrying "out of class" and expectations of gaining easier access to departure from Viet Nam and entry to the U.S..

TABLE IV: Amerasian mothers and children

Group:	N=	Nr. Illit	% Illit	Ave. Y-S
1 Amerasian Mothers	265	27	10.4	4.7
2 PASS Amerasians	229	22	9.6	5.2
3 PASS Half-siblings	50	5	10.0	6.9
4 Y-adult Amerasians	528	32	12.2	5.6
5 Y-adult H-siblings	66	0	0.0	8.4

An examination of TABLE IV tells us that there is no substantial difference in any category between Amerasian children and their mothers in years of schooling and rate of illiteracy. However, some percentage of both Amerasians and half-siblings of Amerasians, both among PASS (14 to 17 year olds) and young adults (17+ years old) had not yet stopped their schooling upon departure from Viet Nam for the PRPC. This might well alter the results on years of schooling for the sampling. This is particularly true of the half-siblings, who in another study by this writer (Ronk, Jan. 1990) showed a markedly higher level of schooling than Amerasians.

One assumes that the low level of achievement in schooling for mothers of Amerasians could have some effect on the achievement goals and actual achievements of their children. How important this factor is is open to question and perhaps worth follow-up study in the United States.*

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*The fact that Amerasians have been arriving in the U.S. in large

Hypothesis 6: The mothers of Afro-Amerasian children have a lower level of achieved schooling and higher illiteracy rate than their female peers in general and Amerasian mother peers.

TABLE V: Afro-Amerasian Mothers

	Group:	N=	Nr. Illit	% Illit	Ave. Y.S.	% C-+
1	Afro-Amer mothers	32	13	40.6	3.9	13.0
2	Amer Mothers	66	10	14.2	4.7	25.8
3	First-Asy mothers	98	4	4.2	7.1	41.5

As hypothesized, the mothers of Afro-Amerasians, as a group, attained less years of schooling an a far higher illiteracy rate than did Amerasian mothers in general and first asylum women, matched peers of the mothers of Afro-Amerasians.

Hypothesis 7: The step-fathers of Afro-Amerasians have significantly higher levels of achieved schooling and English language ability and a lower illiteracy rate than their spouses.

TABLE VI: Afro-Amerasian Step-fathers

	Group:	N=	Nr. Illit	% Illit	Ave. Y.S.	% C-+
1	Afro Step-fathers	10	0	0.0	8.3	40.0
2	Afro-Amer mothers	32	13	40.6	3.9	13.0

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numbers since late 1984, along with half-siblings and first asylum youths, the Amerasians then much younger age than those now arriving, allows for study and comparisons five to six years at this late date.

TABLE VI demonstrates that the step-fathers of Afro-Amerasians do have have a considerably higher number of years of school and a considerably lower illiteracy rate than their spouses, in fact, more than four years more schooling. The percentage of step-fathers of Afro-Amerasian in the more advanced levels of English (Level C or better) upon arrival at the PRPC is, as well, considerably higher; 27 percent higher.

Although the sampling of Afro-Amerasian step-fathers and male caretakers* is small, it is believed by this writer to be reasonably accurate based on observation and discussions with such men at the PRPC who were not part of the sampling used.

Establishing that the step-fathers of Afro-Amerasians married spouses with very considerably less schooling than themselves seems to establish as well that they married well below their own socio-economic class (see the "Discussion" to follow on page 16).**

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*As with the mothers of Amerasians, it is possible that other than spouses of the mothers of Afro-Amerasians are included on the family tree of the Amerasian, e.g. uncle, much older half-sibling, adoptive father. The sample of step-fathers for both Afro-Amerasians and for Amerasians in general were of males between 35 and 55 years of age attached to an Amerasian as indicated by identification card number prefixes.

**Why the stepfathers of both Afro-Amerasians and Amerasians in general married well beneath themselves educationally, and probably in socio-economic class, is beyond the scope of this paper. One area of perhaps worthwhile investigation might be that of fraud in leaving Viet Nam under the Amerasian Homecoming Act -- marriages of convenience. One hastens to note, however, that knowing many step-fathers of Amerasians and their families can, at least in individual cases, lead to far different speculation and conclusions.

Hypothesis 8: The step-fathers of Afro-Amerasians have a lower level of achieved schooling and a higher illiteracy rate than their male first asylum peers and their Amerasian step-father peers.

TABLE VII: Afro-Amerasian Step-fathers

	Group:	N=	Nr. Illit	% Illit	Ave. Y.S.	% C-+
1	Afro Step-fathers	10	0	0.0	8.3	40.0
3	Amer Step-fathers	60	4	6.7	8.6	46.7
4	First-Asy fathers	85	0	0.0	10.2	84.0

The step-fathers of Afro-Amerasians attained years of school at a reasonably close level with their male peers, whether from first asylum camps or stepfathers of Amerasians in general. Because of the small sampling of Afro-Amerasian step-fathers in comparison to the groups of peers, the comparison of illiteracy rate is inconclusive. Placement in the higher levels of English ability for training classes at the PRPC does, however, show a 40 percent difference between first asylum men and their peers who have Amerasian step-children. Why this is so is, again, beyond the scope of this paper.

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A BACKGROUND DISCUSSION: Socio-economics and education in pre-1975 Viet Nam

It is perhaps axiomatic when dealing with Vietnamese that of all institutions of traditional culture and society, educatiion is probably the most important. Education is the means, and

generally the only traditionally acceptable means, to upward mobility socio-economically, or in "class."

Upward mobility through education is a remnant of Confucian government and governing philosophy translated into a system. It is no idle appelation when the term "mandarin" is used to describe a Vietnamese. The mandarin is the governor and/or advisor to the monarch. The mandarin reaches his position through education, culminating in examinations of his learning.

There are, of course, many examinations between the least of a society, such as the peasant child entering school, to the peak of the hierarchy, the learned scholar and teacher and, within that hierarchy, the mandarin.

The crucial step is one upward from that held, as a new step upward is contemplated and sought. That step upward is not for the individual but for the family, and even further, for the lineage -- ancestor and progeny.

Modern socio-economic systems have distorted the values of the Confucian system. The soldier, once well-down the list of valued social levels or classes, saw his status rise with modern war. The merchants as well, almost a reviled class in older times, found themselves as owners of wealth risen in status in changed times.

But it is still "education that makes the man," or woman -- as well as that all-pervasive family -- in Vietnamese culture.

* * * * *

In 1965 this writer went to Viet Nam to become a teacher of

English in a Vietnamese public high school. The public high schools were, except for perhaps three or four exclusive private schools following the French model, the flagships of upward mobility, staffed by the best and brightest, demanding the most, requiring the most as well. To enter the professions, including teaching, which held the highest status, required graduation from one of the best schools. Graduation from such a school guaranteed commission as an officer in the military with its modern high status in the class hierarchy. Being a teacher in these schools brought exemption from the military, generally an even more sought after situation.

A minority of the students I taught, but a significant minority, were essentially peasant stock struggling upward in class, for themselves, their families, their progeny to come and, as importantly, those who predated the present, their ancestors. At 11, 12, 13 through 17 or 18, it was a fearsome burden of not failing examinations and falling by the way-side, at best into the far less elite private high schools that charged tuition, then trying again later to re-enter public school through examinations. To fail out of public high school, particularly if the brightest and the hope for tomorrow in a poor family, was disaster. The other, higher class, students were hell-bent on maintaining the family position, if not raise it higher.

As the importance of money took ever greater hold, however, wealth itself obviated the possiblity of failure. Nobody,

including the public school teacher and principal, wanted to be responsible for failing the children of the "new mandarins" of Viet Nam, the ones who owned the country through money or arms.

Returning then to the study at hand, the reasons for the disparity in educational levels between various groups studied becomes clearer. Those studied here, and compared against one another as groups, are the products of Vietnamese schooling and social classes of the 1950s and 1960s. The amount of education they attained is directly related to their origins and family aspirations. It tells us a great deal about what they were class-wise in 1975 as the war in Viet Nam whimpered out of existence.

Simply ranking the various groups in terms of average years of schooling, which appears to be highly correlated to other scores and rankings, we see a class hierarchy established that could, in turn, be studied and discussed at great length, but which is beyond the scope of this paper. It is offered here as "food for thought."

TABLE VIII: Ranking of Vietnamese groups by years of education*

+	Group	Average Y.S.
1	Males, 35 or more years old	9.6
2	M/F 17-22 years without Amerasian half-sibling(s)	8.4
3	Females, 35 or more without an Amerasian child	7.6
4	Caucasian M/F Amerasians 17 years or more	5.6
5	Caucasian M/F Amerasians 14-16 years	5.2
6	Females 35 or more with Caucasian Amerasian(s)	4.6
7	Females 35 or more with Afro-Amerasian(s)	3.9
8	Afro-Amerasian M/F 17 years or more	3.3
9	Afro-Amerasian M/F 14-16 years	3.1

*Figures used on lines 5, 8 and 9 were taken from an earlier study (Ronk, 1990) on Amerasian schooling achievement and are included to broaden the perspective of the rankings.

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